

Shopping for Running Shoes Chris Durall, DPT

Finding a running shoe that works well can be challenging. Some runners have success choosing cushioned, stability, or motion-control shoes according to their particular foot type (high-arched, neutral, or low-arched respectively). Other runners defy this logical approach and fare perfectly well or even better in a shoe that seems biomechanically inappropriate for their foot shape. Three recent, large scale studies on military recruits showed that assigning shoes based on foot shape has little influence on injury risk.

So where to begin? If you've had good success with a particular *type* of running shoe (cushioned, stability, or motion-control) in the past, consider trying another shoe of the same type. You can also use the "Shoe Advisor" at Runner'sWorld.com. This decision tree will help you find shoes that should be more/less in the ball-park, depending on your personal needs and likes. Consider cross-referencing shoes that you're interested in by reading buyer reviews on Amazon or other sites. If you haven't settled on a particular shoe type in the past, or if you're new to running, it may be helpful to visit a **reputable running shoe specialty store** (**LaCrosse Area:** GrandBluff Running; **Chicago Area:** Fleet Feet Sports, Triathlon World, Universal Sole, Running Away Multisport, Road Runner Sports Store; **Milwaukee Area:** Fleet Feet Sports, Performance Running Outfitters, Instep Running & Walking Center, Fast Foot, The Athlete's Foot, Rodiez's Running Store; **Madison Area:** Fleet Feet Sports, Berkeley Running Company, Endurance House, Movin' Shoes; **Appleton/Oshkosh/Green Bay Area:** Fleet Feet Sports, In Competition, Run Away Shoes; **Wausau Area:** Revel Sports; **Minneapolis Area:** Marathon Sports, Gear Running Store, Running Room USA, TC Running Company). Make sure to **bring (or wear) the socks and orthotics** that you plan to wear while running. Regardless of where you shop, find out the store's return policy before you buy. You should be able to exchange any pair of shoes that's in re-saleable condition. If you prefer to order shoes online, consider purchasing from vendors that have reasonable return policies & free return shipping (e.g. Zappo's, shoebuy.com, RunningWarehouse.com).

Shop for shoes late in the day or right after running as your feet may swell up to **half** a shoe size during a run. Also for this reason, **don't buy shoes that are too tight in the store**. Don't rely on shoe size alone; shoe sizes often vary between different brands and models. Running shoes do not require a break-in period and should feel comfortable right out of the box. The shoe should be long enough so there is a thumbnail-width space between the end of the toebox and the tip of your longest toe on your longer foot. Your toes should wiggle and spread freely in the toebox. Shoes that are too narrow in the forefoot area contribute to cramping, blisters, callouses, bunions and irritation of the nerves in your feet. Make sure your feet are not rubbing against rough spots in the shoe; blisters are likely to form as your skin rubs against these. **Make sure that the heel feels comfortably snug**. If the heel counter is too wide, your heel can piston up & down in the shoe.

Test run in the shoes. This is really the only way to ensure that the shoes fit properly. Test running in shoes is like test-driving cars and very few people buy a car without driving it around a bit. Try the shoes during 2-3 treadmill runs before running outside. If they don't feel good to run in, move on.

Once you find shoes that work well for you, **consider buying a second pair of the same shoes**, and alternate these on each run. This will increase the longevity of your shoes. Consider also buying a new pair of shoes when your other pair is half worn out. Then you can alternate the new and old pairs and reduce the risks of injury due to lost cushioning or stabilization.

Be careful about transitioning from traditional running shoes (which have a built-up well-cushioned heel to absorb heel impact) to "minimalist" shoes (without the heel build-up). Consider using a transitional shoe with a slightly built-up heel to bridge the gap (e.g. Saucony Kinvara). Regardless, transitions between shoes should be made gradually.

Replace your shoes every 300-600 miles or when the shoe fails to support or cushion your foot. It's also a good idea to replace your insoles every 200 miles for extra cushioning.